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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: Kyrgyz Media Reaction to CENTCOM CDR Petraeus's Visit

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: General Petraeus's January 17-20 visit to Kyrgyzstan has been front-page news this week. Media reaction to the General's visit and his January 19 press conference has been closely intertwined with rumors in the press that the Government of Kyrgyzstan plans to expel Manas Air Base. Some newspapers put a familiar, negative spin on Petraeus's visit, saying that he came to Kyrgyzstan only to save Manas Air Base and listing past incidents involving the Base. Some agreed with General Petraeus's characterization that the rumors in the press about the Kyrgyz Government possibly requesting the Base to be withdrawn may be "Central Asian Negotiation." Two major newspapers made arguments supporting the Base and praising the Base's role in the war on terrorism. End Summary.

SAME OLD ANTI-BASE ARGUMENTS

¶2. (SBU) Independent Russian-language weekly "Megapolis" wrote an article entitled "We Can't Get Rid of Them." The article accuses General Petraeus of unilaterally declaring that the Base will stay here "because I said so." The article says the purpose of the Base is "to expand the U.S. sphere of influence and empire." The article includes a list of incidents involving the Base, such as an incident in which American serviceman hit two women with his car in 2002, alleged rapes (Comment: this is the first time the Embassy has heard of the rape allegations), the 2006 incident involving the disappearance of an Air Force Major, and the 2006 shooting of a Kyrgyz citizen by a U.S. airman.

"CENTRAL ASIAN NEGOTIATION"

¶3. (SBU) Independent, pseudo-intellectual Russian-language weekly "Obshestvenniy Rating" reprinted an article from the Russian press, quoting a specialist from the Central Asian and Kazakhstan Institute in Russia, Andrey Grozin. Grozin agrees with General Petraeus's characterization that there is some Central Asian-style negotiating taking place around Manas Air Base. Grozin says, "Practically every year Kyrgyzstan is able to get more money for the Air Base. Under

Akayev, the Kyrgyz got the modest sum of less than 10 million dollars but now, according to official reports, the Americans pay 51 million dollars every year plus grants in different areas, including humanitarian assistance. In total, the Base provides benefits to the Kyrgyz Republic to the tune of 100 million dollars or more." Further, he says that the U.S. "buys off" Kyrgyz officials, "not with suitcases of money, but with technical assistance, training, and trips." He concludes that the Kyrgyz Republic is neither "anti-Russian nor anti-American," but rather opportunistic in taking advantage of both Russian and American assistance. Another independent commentator in the same newspaper wrote that he disagreed with the characterization that these negotiations are "Central Asian methods of negotiation." Instead, he characterized the negotiations as "classic diplomacy."

BAKIYEV GIVING HIMSELF PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

14. (SBU) Pro-Russian "Delo Nomer" wrote that whenever talk turns to expelling the Base, a high-ranking American comes to Bishkek on a "long-planned" visit. The author asks, "If it is not true that the Kyrgyz Government wants to close Manas Air Base, why are we not hearing it from the Kyrgyz Government? Who is the boss of our country [if they send an American to give us this news]?" The article notes that President Bakiyev, unlike the presidents of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, preferred not to meet with General Petraeus. The article speculates that President Bakiyev wanted to give himself "room to maneuver" so he could tell the Russians "I didn't promise anyone anything." Noting that President Bakiyev's trip to Moscow, originally planned for January 16, was pushed back to February, the author implies that the presidential administration may still be preparing documents to expel the Base: "The President's administration says the reason for the trip being postponed is that

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they need to 'prepare some documents.'"

"BASE PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN WAR ON TERROR"

15. (SBU) The local supplement to the Russian newspaper "Komsomolskaya Pravda" speculated that President Bakiyev's former Chief-of-Staff, Medet Sadyrkulov, resigned because he was unwilling to expel Manas Air Base. However, the author says that the President can easily find a "careerist" who would be willing to sign the papers to expel the Base. The article lists past, negative incidents involving the Base, but says, "It's important to remember, though, that Manas, without exaggeration, plays an important role in the worldwide war against terrorism. Of course, it's a pity that individual scoundrels in stripes ruin the general presentation of a noble and complicated mission. But in the end, we have a common enemy. Remember the bloody events eight years ago involving extremists in the south of our country. This happened, in fact, when the Taliban in Afghanistan were at their strongest. Do you really want the Taliban to return to power? We can't forget that eighty percent of the international coalition's efforts in Afghanistan have been concentrated on humanitarian and social programs: building hospitals, schools, power stations, roads, and creating jobs, etc. In other words, the soldiers there are busier restoring peaceful life -- not war. And who knows, maybe strengthening their contingent by 30,000 troops will finally, and forever, defeat extremists. And then there can be talks about closing Manas Air Base." (Comment: The author, Azamat Tynayev, participated in a week-long media embed in Afghanistan in June 2008, which was arranged by the public affairs sections of Manas Air Base and the Embassy.)

"MANAS IS IN EVERYONE'S INTEREST"

16. (SBU) The largest daily newspaper, independent Russian-language "Vecherniy Bishkek" published an article with the headline, "Neither Kyrgyzstan nor Russia would benefit from Manas Air Base Withdrawal." The article provides background about the Base and situation in Afghanistan, and says: "The American Base at Manas was created owing to Vladimir Putin's mediation between Washington and Bishkek."

[This was revealed a long time ago by then Russian Defense Minister and current Deputy Chief of the Russian Government, Sergey Ivanov.] It would be good to remind those who keep stirring up odd excitement and saying that the Base is a stumbling block between the Kremlin and the White House. And that, reportedly, capricious Kyrgyzstan is now thinking which superpower to drop the handkerchief to and for how much. Amid the rumors about the impending withdrawal of the contingent harped on by Russian media, the most paradoxical thing is that Moscow should be the first one to be interested in keeping the Pentagon outpost on our territory. [. . .] So, be sure, nobody would even think of closing the Base, especially having the information provided by General Petraeus. He said that last year, the number of terrorist attacks doubled. There is nothing left but to dispose with them with doubled force."

WACKY THEORIES PERSIST

[17](#). (SBU) Anti-American Russian-language daily, "Beliy Parus," a newspaper which is known for its wacky theories, speculated that the talk about Manas Air Base was really just a smokescreen to distract from how the Kyrgyz Government plans to pilfer the proffered \$2 billion loan from Russia. Another "Beliy Parus" theory is that Manas Air Base is beneficial to Russia because the U.S. uses Manas to transport opium directly to Western Europe, bypassing Russian soil. Finally, they theorize that if the Kyrgyz Republic expels the Base, the U.S. will "be deeply offended and will never forgive us." "The U.S. will become active -- even super active -- in financing the opposition." They even hinted that the U.S. may even support an Islamic uprising in Kyrgyzstan.

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